

Missouri Association of Local Public Health Agencies

Tips for Building Relationships with Legislators

- 1) Invite legislators for a personal tour of your office and facilities.
- 2) Invite them to public events you are involved in related to public health (health fair, ribbon cutting of new fitness facilities, accreditation celebration, etc.)
- 3) Get to know them personally. Find out about their family, interests, history and anything that might help you connect. Share things about yourself that are related. “My son plays soccer too! What position does yours play?” Have you been to the new fields in ____?”
- 4) Get to know them in a different environment, such as a campaign event or civic club, and let them get to know you. We are all more comfortable working with people we know and are more likely to trust them as well. If legislators trust you and see you as a reliable source of information your policy world will change. They might even start reaching out to you for advice or analysis BEFORE filing a bill.
- 5) Be active in community organizations and activities in which they might be involved – Chambers, nonprofits, churches, etc.
- 6) Invite them to breakfast or lunch 1:1 just to get to know them and what makes them tick.
- 7) Send them a handwritten note, or at least an email, when they are in the news for doing something positive. Congratulate them. Remember, they are human and everyone likes recognition.
- 8) Send a thank-you note for anything they do that is helpful.
- 9) If a community group (i.e. the Chamber) has a Jefferson City day – go with them. It is good for them to see you as an important and CONNECTED part of their community.
- 10) Check whether the local hospital has a legislative forum and ask if you can attend.
- 11) Do the same with any other health-related organizations.
- 12) Get to know their “hot buttons” and any critical issues in their life. Identify a connection or a strategy related to Public Health. For example, if they are fiercely independent and you hear them often refer to “personal responsibility,” share how important that is in health, that we need individuals to take all the steps they can to prevent and protect health. This includes hand washing, getting immunizations, etc.

- 13) If they are concerned about food safety regulations, help them understand that public health supports those who are doing the right thing, helps those who need to do better, and protects the public when there are serious problems.
- 14) Have stories ready for your conversations with them. They are much more likely to remember a story than anything else you tell them. Have a story for each program, service and division in your agency.
- 15) Give them regular updates on things happening in the health department. Send email to give them examples of your work with an outbreak or investigation, something you found during an inspection, data about the community, etc.
- 16) Have fun and be fun with them. Yes, you need to be serious when sharing the importance of public health, but after that, be personable. They would much rather develop a relationship with someone they like than a “stick in the mud” (unless of course they are partial to sticks and mud)!

NOTE: This document was originally authored by Julie Eckstein, St. Charles County Health Director.